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POEMS.

BY

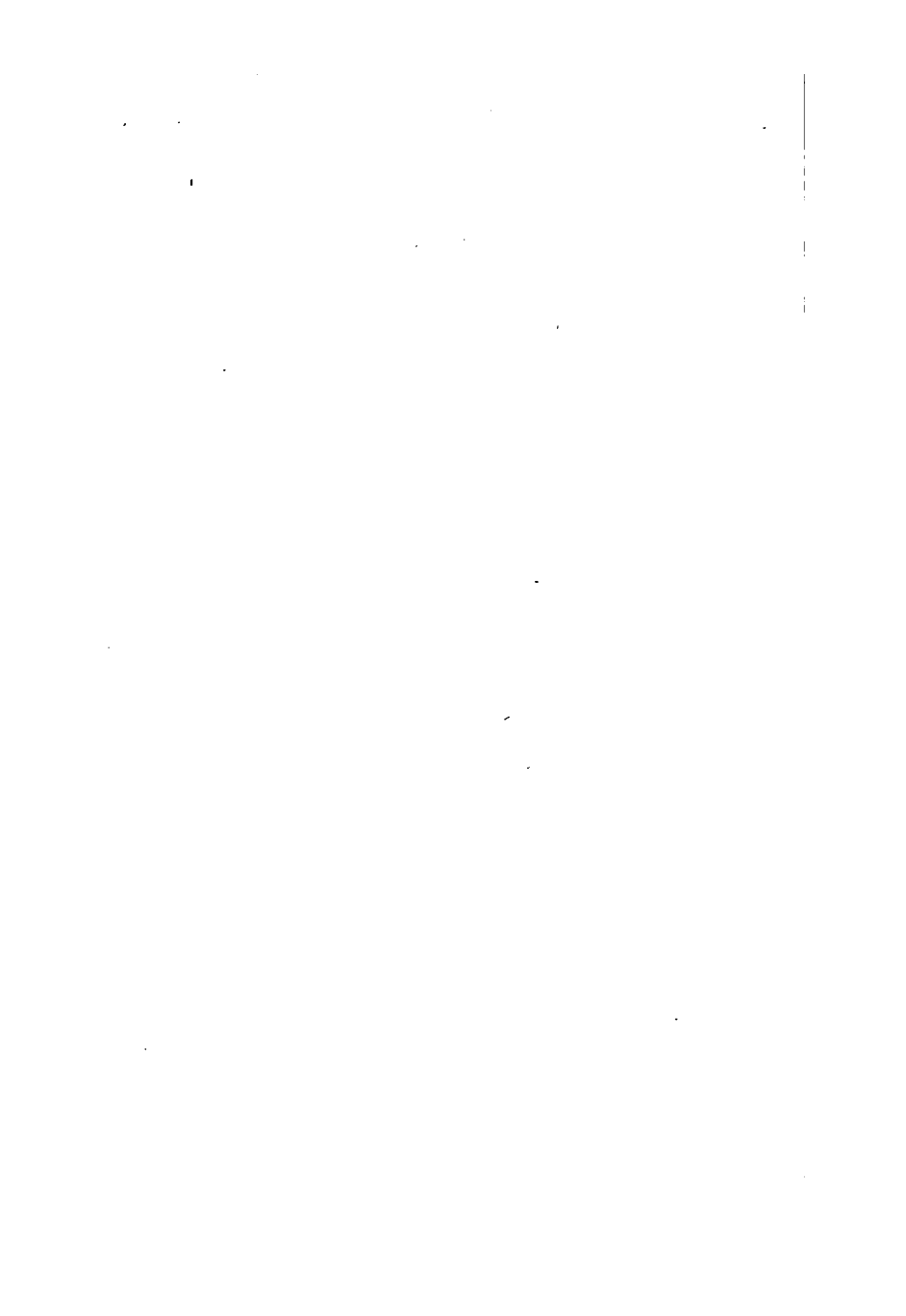


COVENTRY PATMORE.

LONDON:

EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

M DCCC XLIV.



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Upon a rise, where single oaks,
And clumps of beeches tall,
Drop pleasantly their shade beneath,
Half-hidden amidst them all,
Resteth, in quiet dignity,
An ancient manor-hall.

Around its many gable-ends,
The swallows wheel their flight;
Its huge fantastic weather-vanes
Look happy in the light;
Its warm face through the foliage gleams,
A comfortable sight.

The ivy'd turrets seem to love
The murmur of the bees;
And though this manor-hall hath seen
The snow of centuries,
How freshly still it stands amid
Its wealth of swelling trees!

The leafy summer-time is young;
The yearling lambs are strong;
The sunlight glanceth merrily;
The trees are full of song;
The plain and polish'd River flows
Contentedly along.

Beyond the River, bounding all,
A host of green hills stand,
The manor-rise their central point,
As cheerful as a band
Of happy children round their chief
Extended, hand in hand.

Their shadows from the setting sun
Reach all across the plain;
The guard-hound, in the silent night,
Stops wrangling with his chain,
To hear, at every burst of barks,
The hills bark back again.

Look! where the merry butterflies

Float beside yonder tower:

There, amid starry jessamine,

And clasping passion-flower,

The Lady of this peaceful place

Is seated in her bower.

That Lady loves the pale Witchaire,

Who loves too much to sue.

He came this morning hurriedly;

Then out her young blood flew!

But he talked of common things, and so

Her eyes are steeped in dew.

PART II.

TIME runneth on: through strong belief
Of disregard—or pride—
Or passion cooled—or causes that
The intricate heart doth hide,
The Lady hath her promise given
To be another's Bride.

November and the rains are come ;
The River, once so bright,
Is foul and black, and gloomily
Makes known, across the night,
In far-heard plash, and hollow drench,
The passage of its might.

The Bridegroom hurrieth through the park.

The hour is here at last !

The dark trees chatter drearily

Within the dying blast:

He thinks the Bride is at his side—

What cares he for the blast !

The guests are gay; the minstrels play;

The hall is liker noon than night;

From side to side they toast the Bride,

Who blusheth ruby light:

For youth and age, for clown and sage,

It is a cheerful sight !

But to the park—Ill suiteth us

This merry noise and glare—

The silent park, where a figure stands

That's darker than the night—Witchaire,

Leaning against an aged tree

By thunder stricken bare.

He mindeth neither warmth nor cold,
Nor marketh he the dull moonshine,
And yet he crieth, "Chill! oh! chill,
Is this lonely heart of mine!"
And yet he crieth, "Misery!
Cold is the dull moonshine!"

The moonshine shineth in his eye,
From which no tear doth fall:
Full of vacancy as death,
Its slaty, parched ball.
Fixedly, though expressionless,
Gleams on the distant hall.

Thence, tinged by colour'd figures quaint,
Of nun and saint devout,
Broad bars of red and purple light,
Stand in the mist without;
Mournfully through the muffled air
Cometh the laughter-shout.

No sound or sight this solemn night
But moveth a dull fear :
The faded nuns stare through the gloom,
Askaunt, and wan, and blear ;
The withered cheeks of the watchful saints
Start from their purple gear.

The treble of the women's voice
Seems heightened to a wail ;
The stream, behind the matted grove,
Is shining ghastly pale,
White-glimmering through the cedars dark.
—Witchaire ! what doth thee ail ?

His forehead cleareth suddenly !
Some thought brings pleasant balm.
He straighteneth up, and now he stands
Erect as any palm.
Hath he some soothing plan of life ?
No ; for he looks too calm.

He turneth from the bridal hall;
His bare breast scarcely heaves;
He paceth towards the gloomy wood,
Through which he breaks and cleaves;
His measured footfall dies away,
Upon the withered leaves.

PART III.

THE sickly moon, among the clouds,
Is loitering slowly by;
Now in a circle, like the ring
About a weeping eye;
Now left quite bare; now merely like
A pallor in the sky.

The lonely stars are here and there,
But weak and wasting all ;
The winds are dead ; the cedars spread
Their black arms like a pall ;
The guests have vanished, one by one,
Out of the bridal hall.

The moon is looking through the mist,
Cold, lustreless, and wan ;
How wildly past her dreary form
Those watery clouds rush on !
A moment white beneath her light,
And then, like spirits, gone.

Silent and fast they hurry past,
Their swiftmess striketh dread,
For earth is hush'd, and no breath sweeps
The spider's dewy thread,
And everything but those pale clouds
Is dark, and still, and dead.

Beneath the mossy ivy'd bridge,
The River slippeth past;
That current deep is still as sleep,
And yet so very fast!
There's something in its quietness
Which makes the soul aghast.

No wind stirreth the willow tree
That droopeth from the bank;
The water goeth quietly
Beneath the sedges dank;
Yet the willow trembleth in the stream,
And the dry reeds talk and clank.

The weak stars swoon; the jagged moon
Is lost in the cloudy air.
No thought of light! save where the wave
Sporteth a fitful glare.
The world, in breathless impotence,
Seems choking with nightmare.

The hall clocks clang; the guard-hounds bark.

What are their dreams about?

Marsh-lights leap; and, though fast asleep,

The night-owls shriek and shout;

The stars, through breaks in the absolute black,

Race like a drunken rout.

Some figure stands on the bridge: you see

The pale cheeks in the dark.

It watcheth the stars race on in the stream,

And knoweth them not:—but hark!

The clocks stop tolling, the owls are still,

The guard-hounds cease to bark.

A plunge!—a thin hand through the froth—

A stifled gurgling sound:—

The circlets dance, with lurid glance,

Like witches, round and round;

Big bubbles rise, like demons' eyes;

The wavelets skip and bound

From side to side, and far and wide,

The echoes clash their knell;

From side to side the echoes ride;

Hark, how the owls now yell!

The turmoil's o'er; the waves once more

Resume their silent swell.

“Wake! wake!” meanwhile the Bridegroom calls

Aloud to his sleeping Bride.

“O God! I saw thee, pale and dead,

Roll down a silent tide!”

He claspeth her hand—“How chill thou art!

Why tremblest thou, my bride?”

The Bride bethinketh her of him

Who last night was no guest.

“Sweet Heaven!—and for me?—I dream!

Be calm, thou throbbing breast!”

She saith in thought a solemn prayer,

And turneth again to rest.

Along, along, swiftly and strong,
The River slippeth past;
That current deep is still as sleep,
And yet so very fast!
There's something in its quietness
Which makes the soul aghast.

PART IV.

THE morn hath risen: wildly on
The waters glide to-day;
Outspread upon their pallid face,
Lank grass and rushes play;
But the spell that clung to the murky stream
Is broken, and passed away.

Time runneth on : the park is bare;
The year is scant and lean;
The River's banks are desolate;
The air is chill and keen;
Yet now and then a sunny day
Bringeth a thought of green.

Amid bleak February's flaw,
Tremulous snowdrops peep;
Erect and sharp the crocus starts
Up from its winter sleep;
The river-buds, in starry hosts,
Ride on the water deep.

The current, in its old content,
Betwixt fresh banks doth run;
The pike, as trackless as a sound,
Shoots through the waters dun;
And languid April chesnut leaves
Have broadened in the sun.

The summer's prime is come again;
The trees are out anew;
The current keeps the dreadful Past
Deep in its bosom blue;
And babbleth low, through sleeping fields,
Grey with the falling dew.

The sheep-bell tolleth curfew-time;
The gnats, a busy rout,
Fleck the warm air; the distant owl
Shouteth a sleepy shout;
The voiceless bat, more felt than seen,
Is flitting round about;

The aspen leaflets scarcely stir;
The River seems to think;
Athwart the dusk, the lotus broad
Looks coolly from its brink,
Where, listening to the freshet's noise,
The quiet cattle drink.

The bees boom past; the white moths rise,
Like spirits, from the ground;
The grey-flies hum their weary tune,
A distant, dream-like sound;
And far, far off, to the slumberous eve,
Bayeth an old guard-hound.

In this sweet time the Lady walks
Beside the gentle Stream;
She marks the waters curl along
Beneath the sunset-gleam,
And a doubtful influence moveth her,
Like memory of a dream.

Her pulses throb more palpably;
Her spirits droop and fail,
As they did that night when the Bridegroom thought
He saw her dead and pale;—
She knoweth not what moveth her:
The Stream hath told no tale.

She passeth on. How still the earth,
And all the air above!
Here, where of late the scritch-owl shrieked,
Broodeth the quiet dove;
And the River, through the ivy'd bridge,
Flows calm as household love.

SONG.

DEAR mother, do not blame me, nor Ronald either,
pray!

Last night he looked so thoughtful; how could I say
him nay!

And see, dear mother, see! he came just now to
bring

These roses in my bosom, the earliest of the spring.

Poor Ronald said so little, but his face expressed so
much,

That, when he gave them to me, I trembled at his
touch:

His eyes were red all round, that once were full of
glee,
And it must have been from waking, and weeping
about me.

Then why, dear mother, why do you say it was not
right
To give the hour he wished for, to walk in the
moonlight?
O! even if he asked me to walk with him all day,
And I knew how much he loved me, how could I
say him nay?

I KNEW a soft-eyed lady, from a noble foreign land;
Her words, I thought, were lowest when we walked
out, hand in hand:

I began to say, " God pleasing, I shall have her for
my bride."

Bitter, bitter, bitter was it to me when she died!

In the street a man since stopped me: in a noble
foreign tongue

He said he was a stranger, poor, and strangers all
among.

I know your thoughts, yet tell you, World,—I gave
him all I had.

But I—I'm much the wisest;—it is you, O World !
that's mad.

He stared upon the proffered purse; then took it,
hand and all.

O! what a look he gave me, while he kept my hand
in thrall!

And press'd it with a gratitude that made the
blushes start;

For I had not deserved it, and it smote me to the
heart.

THE WOODMAN'S DAUGHTER.

IN "Gerald's Cottage," on the hill,
Old Gerald, and his child—
His daughter, Maud—dwelt happily;—
He worked, and she beguiled
The long day at her spinning-wheel,
In the garden, now grown wild.

At Gerald's stroke the jay awoke;
Till noon hack followed hack,
Before the nearest hill had time
To give its echo back;
The evening mists were in the lane
Before his arm grew slack.

Meanwhile, beneath the coronets
Of honey-suckle flower,
Which made their simple cottage-porch
A cool, luxurious bower,
Maud sat beside her spinning-wheel,
And spun from hour to hour.

The growing thread through her fingers sped;
Round flew the polished wheel;
Merrily-rang the notes she sang
At every finished reel;
From the hill again, like a shrill refrain,
Out leapt the rapid peal.

If Gerald worked in the wood hard by,
The task, o'er which he frown'd,
Was then continued placidly:
The villagers around
Would oft declare the morning air
Grew clearer from the sound.

These sounds are heard no more; no more
The gnarl'd and lichen'd oak
Shakes moss and earth from its crooked roots,
Quick starting at the stroke
Which once kept all day long from sleep
The silence it awoke.

The woodman died long since: his axe
Reddens the prostrate bough
In which he struck it last; and, though
The villagers allow
The spot its ancient title, Maud
Is its sole tenant now.

The flies now rest all day around
The dusty spinning-wheel:
The neighbours think it strange Maud's grief
Should take so long to heal;—
The cause they know for it is nought
To the cause she doth conceal.

Her tale is this: In that sweet age,
When heaven's our side the lark,
She used to be with Gerald, where
He worked from dawn to dark,
For months, to thin the crowded groves
Of the ancient Manor Park.

She went merely to think she helped;
And, whilst he hack'd and saw'd,
The rich squire's son, a young boy then,
For whole days, as if awed,
Stood by, and gazed alternately
At Gerald and at Maud.

He sometimes, in a sullen tone,
Would offer fruits, and she
Always received his gifts with an air
So unreserved and free,
That half-feign'd distance soon became
Familiarity.

Therefore in time, when Gerald shook
The woods at his employ,
The young heir and the cottage girl
Would steal out to enjoy
The music of each other's talk,
A simple girl and boy.

They passed their time, both girl and boy,
Uncheck'd, unquestion'd; yet
They always hid their wanderings
By wood and rivulet,
Because they could not give themselves
A reason why they met.

—It may have been in the ancient time,
Before Love's earliest ban,
Psychēan curiosity,
Had broken Nature's plan;
When all that was not youth was age,
And men knew less of Man;—

Or, when the works of Time shall reach
The goal to which they tend,
And knowledge, being perfect, shall
At last in wisdom end,—
That wisdom to end knowledge;—or
Some change comes, yet unkennd;—

It perhaps may be again, that men,
Like orange plants, will bear,
At once, the many fine effects
To which God made them heir—
Large souls, large forms, and love like that
Between this childish pair.—

Two summers passed away; and then,—
Though yet young Merton's eyes,
Wide with their language, spake of youth's
Habitual surprise,—
He felt that pleasures such as these
No longer could suffice.

He therefore sought new joys from books;

He turn'd them o'er and o'er,—

Fiction and truth, yet chiefiest truth,—

And only wondered more,

Trying to solve the things that were

So wonderful before.

He sometimes paused, to breathe awhile,

And glanced proud looks around:

“To-morrow I will go,” said he,

“And tell her what I've found.”

And Merton's heart, as he thought of that,

Beat till he heard the sound.

So when to-morrow came, while Maud

Stood listening with surprise,

He told the tale learnt overnight,

And, if he met her eyes,

Perhaps said how far the stars were, and

Talk'd on about the skies.

Thus fable, science, history,
Were all pour'd forth at chance;
And real knowledge thus became
So coloured by romance,
That, for awhile, it was as sweet,
Almost, as ignorance.

Their childhood fled; and still their life
Was one long jubilee;
For Maud, by Nature helped, had now
Acquired the power to see
The second Nature opened through
Deep-thoughted poetry.

She wept for joy if the cushat sang
Its love-song in the fir;
The cat, perhaps, broke the quiet with
Its regular slow purr—
'Twas music now; and her wheel gave forth
A rhythm in its whirr.

She once had read,—When lovers die,
And go where angels are,
Each pair of lovers' souls, perhaps,
Will make a double star:
So stars grew dearer, and she thought
They did not look so far.

But being ignorant, and still
So young as to be prone
To think all very great delights
Peculiarly her own,
She guessed not what to her made sweet
Books writ on lover's moan.

Time passed away. The month was May,
But almost upon June;
The linnets to the joyful time
Their voices did attune;
And hermit moles crept out, to suck
The pleasant breath of noon.

The two friends met, and wandered forth,
Along the river-side,
Talking of this and that by the way :
She questioned, and he replied ;
And she now remembered suddenly
A question yet untried:—

“ How is it that we never talk
Of love, like other things ?
Let's do so now, and you shall tell
Its nature, and whence springs
This joy of which the poet so
Continually sings.”

If Maud had looked upon him then,
She would have seen how pale
His face grew ; but, at last, he said,
“ If, Sweet—if poet's fail
To explain this to you, how shall I ?
Besides, of small avail——”

And here he ceased, forgetting what

He was about to say.

Observing this, Maud tried to turn

The talk another way,

And worded thus her next stray thought—

At least, she thought it stray :

“ Last evening, when, just after dusk,

You rose up to depart,

We saw the moon, all liquid white,

Out of the dark trees start :—

As then I felt, I felt when you

First came upon my heart.”

He mostly answered Maud's remarks

By an unmix'd applause

Of all she spoke; but now, with a fear

For which he knew no cause,

He said, “ That's love, Sweet,” hurriedly;

And then there was a pause.

The multitudinous clouds moved past,
In broad, swell'n heaps uproll'd,
Like globular flakes, or wreathed surge
Of boiling, embossed gold;
And all between their carv'd forms stood
The plain skies, blue, and cold;

The flat, white river, laps'd along,
Now, a broad, broken glare,
Now, winding around through the bosomed lands,
Till lost in the distance, where
The tall hills, sunning their chisell'd peaks,
Made emptier the empty air;

Swallows, among the boisterous winds,
Were striving to and fro;
The raving trees tossed out their arms
Toward the sky; below,
The streaming corn-fields smoothly sped,
In one continual flow.

Maud felt the wind, and saw the scene;

The cottage, on the mound,

Motionless stood in the moving air;

She threw her eyes around:

"Love," said she, "is a noble thing!"

And her eyes were on the ground.

And Merton's eyes were fixed there too;

But different feelings wrought

To the same effect in each; they went

Right on, nor said they aught,

But quickened their steps, as if they strove

To overtake their thought.

He spoke at last some scattered words;

Thus aiming to prevent

The increase of what he never knew

Till then—embarrassment;

Unfelt by Maud, who was alone

Upon her joy intent.

But new urged questionings soon placed
Her lover at his ease:
They looked again, with a novel joy,
At the distant river and leas,
And talked on, nearly as before,
Under the shady trees.

The noon-day fled: still on they sped,
Their hands lock'd each in each;
The youth, now and then, pluck'd wantonly
The flowers within his reach;
And both felt a strong unusual joy,
For which they wanted speech.

Such careless, riotous delight
They never felt before;
"But then," thought they, "so fine a day
We never knew before!"
So they held their faces towards the wind,
That they might feel it more.

Their new delight was not unmixed:

That indistinct alarm

Which whispers, to unsullied minds,

The coming on of harm,

Made joy sit heavily, like pain,

And half undid the charm.

Their steps now faster and faster grew,

Irregular and fast:

His cheeks were ridged with a strong smile,

Hers wore a serious cast,

And neither spoke, nor spent they a look

On anything they passed.

Questions, from which Maud knew not why

She always had abstained,

Appeared, she also knew not why,

About to be explained;

Doubts, more than ever dubious then,

Engrossed what thoughts remained.

But Merton's thoughts were less confused.

“What! *I* wrong aught so good?

Besides, the danger that is seen

Is easily withstood.”

Then loud, “The sun is very warm!”

And they walked into the wood.

* * * *

Months passed away; and every day

The lovers still were wont

To meet together, and their shame

At meeting had grown blunt;

For they were of an age when sin

Is only seen in front.

But this did not continue long,

For Maud began to shun

Her father's sight, in which alone

She knew what she had done;

So Gerald stayed at home one day,

And asked what she had done.

She answer'd him.—“ Poor child!—poor child!”

Was all he ever said.

Weeks afterwards he'd put his hand

Softly upon her head,

And think of her as tranquilly

As wise men of the dead.

Such times she strongly shook with tears,

And though she had given o'er

All thoughts of love and Merton, cried,—

If only he forbore

To look so calm, indeed she'd not

See Merton any more.

* * * *

Poor Maud comes out to feel the air,

This gentle day of June;

And having sobbed her babe to sleep,

Help'd by the stream's soft tune,

She rests along the aspen trunk,

Below the calm blue noon.

Her thoughts now rise instead of tears :

When Merton met her last

It was just such a day as this—

How life since then has passed!

How henceforth pass it?—for she feels

Her mind is ebbing fast.

Best break at once her present plan!

Out-blush the heavy shame—

Bear scorn she cannot scorn in turn—

Unanswerable blame;

Lose—that whose worth is never felt

Till lost—a spotless name.

But Merton? He, if that were done,

Could scarcely fail to know

The ruin he had caused;—he might

Be brought to share her woe,

Making it doubly sharp. With that

She weeps aside—and, lo!

The shadow of her little babe,
Deep in the stream, behold!
Smiles quake over her parted lips:
Some thought hath made her bold;
She stoops to dip her fingers in
To feel if it is cold.

The water's warm, and runs as if
Perpetually at play!
But then the stream, she recollects,
Bears everything away!
There is a dull pool some way off,
That sleepeth night and day.

* * * * *
* * * * *

The weeds at length have closed and shut
The water from her sight:
They stir awhile, but now are still.
Her arms fall down;—the light
Is horrible, and her countenance
Is pale as a cloud at night.

Merrily now from the small church spire
Ringeth a noisy chime;
The larks climb up through the heavenly blue,
Carolling as they climb;
And lo! in her eyes stands the great surprise
That comes with the first crime!

She throws a glance of terror round :
There's not a creature nigh.
But, behold! the Sun, that looketh through
The frowning western sky,
Is lifting up one broad beam, like
A lash of God's own eye.

She sees it; and, with steady fear
At what she dares not shun,
Still gazes: her astonished heart
Faints down, for she has done
An act which to her soul has made
A spy of the great Sun.

The pool reflects the scarlet west
With a hot and guilty glow,
The east is changing ashy pale,
And yet she dares not go,
For still those bubbles struggle up
From the rotting weeds below.

The light has changed. One minute since
You scarcely could descry
The moon, now sharply gleaming,
From the cloud that sleepeth nigh,
And one by one the timid stars
Are coming from the sky.

The night is far advanced, yet Maud
Remaineth at her post,
Sunk in a deep unnatural sleep,
Beneath the skiey host
Of drifting mists, through which the moon
Is riding, like a ghost.

* * * * *
* * * * *

Maud, with her books, comes day by day,
Fantastically clad,
To read them near the pool; and all
Who meet her look so sad,
That even to herself it is
Quite plain that she is mad.

GERALDINE.

GERALDINE, the sun is out!
Let us leave this busy rout;
Men and women, girls and boys,
All the city's stir and noise.
Come! and, while we rove along,
I will chant thee such a song!
Song so full of praise, I wist,
'Tis not girlhood's to resist.—
Why do sceptic flittings fine
Wreathe thy red lips, Geraldine?

We are in the fields. Delight!
Look around! The bird's-eyes bright;
Pink-tipp'd daisies; sorrel red,
Drooping o'er the lark's green bed;
Oxlips; glazed buttercups,
Out of which the wild bee sups;
See! they dance about thy feet!
Play with, pluck them, little Sweet!
Some affinity divine
Thou hast with them, Geraldine.

Now, sweet wanton, toss them high;
Race about, you know not why.
Now stand still, from sheer excess
Of exhaustless happiness.
I, meanwhile, on this old gate,
Sit sagely calm, and perhaps relate
Lore of fairies. Do you know
How they make the mushrooms grow?
Ah! what means that shout of thine?
You can't tell me, Geraldine.

Shall I call thy voice's ringing
Talking, laughing, or wild singing?
April rain through waving trees;
Plashings cool of sunlit seas;
Breezes in the bearded corn;
Robins piping on the thorn;
Prattling brooks in pebbled dells;
Clearest chimes of silver bells;—
None so glad as voice of thine,
Joyous, laughing Geraldine.

Who hath eyes so soft as you—
Such translucent shady blue?
Poets, men of all the earth
Truest judges of true worth,
Steal the life of their sweet books
From the heaven of such looks,
Though Love doom them, every man,
To punishment Promethean.—
Where are those sceptic flittings fine,
That wreath'd thy red lips, Geraldine?

'Tis fine, I vow, to see you, now
All men to your beauty bow;
Fine to hear you, night and day,
Whispering happy hearts away;
Cheating age, and cheating youth
With a well-shamm'd show of truth.

To some it will be finer still
Seeing you descend the hill;
Careless lovers dropping off;
Scoff'd at, where you used to scoff.
Cause to some for triumph yet!
—If 'twere not so for regret.

But finer much 'twill be to such
Watching you in Time's full clutch;
Dead to losses; dead to gains;
Dead to pleasures; dead to pains;
Fearing still to part with breath:—
Dead to everything but death.

LILIAN.

A POEM FOR 1844.

Prologue.

I SCARCELY knew my school friend
On his entering, but could see,
As talking re-establish'd
Our familiarity,
A kind of pleading sweetness
Play about his eyes, that told
Of too precocious passions,
Which had made him early old.

I therefore ask'd no reason

For his absence. Perhaps he read

The question in my silence,

And why urged not,—for he said,

Abruptly, “ It is long since

We have met. You think me changed?

And you shall hear the causes;

But not now.” His eyes then ranged

In restless search for something

To be fix'd on. Then he smiled,

Resuming his old manner,

So indifferent and mild,

And ask'd what I was reading

When he first came in. The book

Lay by me on the table,

And he open'd it to look.

It struck quick transformation
Through his visage at a glance.
(The work all tongues were full of:
'Twas a brilliant French romance;—
Fair type of those which furnish
Half the reading of the class
Whose manners are the standard
For the manners of the mass.)

Red indignation flooded
Through his cheeks, and his mild eyes
Were powerful in anger.
I was silent for surprise.
He then, without explaining
His wild gesture, like a man
Whom wrongs have arm'd with judgment,
Dash'd the book down, and began:

" O Heaven! then can I nowhere
Plant my hope, but there advance
These literary panders
Of that mighty brothel, France!
What hideous act committed—
What huge sin of general man,
Precipitates upon him
This, sin's most tremendous ban—

" The doom which makes sin huger,
Therefore seems beyond repeal!"
Then to me: " I came, expecting
To find one whose early zeal
For honest thoughts had haply
Kept its place, and kept it pure:—
But there's a youth in virtue,
Which I see does not endure!"

To that I answer'd lightly,

“ You are not yourself, and so
These words must be forgiven.

For the anger you bestow
On France's luckless favourites,

'Tis too violent to be wise;
Their sins are their own beacons,
Staring through their thin disguise.

“ At worst—are souls worth saving

Which are lost with so much ease!
If sound, can they make shipwreck
Upon mud-banks such as these?

Au reste, the books excite one—

Shew like nature—(French, I grant)
Are subtly nerv'd with passion—
All we novel readers want.”

" You are not wholly serious,"

He replied, " or I should scorn
A word in confutation.

As it is, for friendship born
Too long ago between us
To be readily undone,
I would not—will not—leave you,
Till our minds on this be one.

" I therefore do acquaint you,
I have seen the venom act,
And urge no more than simply
The strong logic of a fact:
And, good friend, should its statement
Take a somewhat broader range,
Forgive the whole, as solving
My blank absence and grey change.

“ But do not deem my language
Fit to laud the lavish worth,
Which the influence you question
Brought to miserable dearth.
Should I attempt its praises,
Hold them less, not more, than true.”
He now began his story;
And believing, as I do,

That the sum, the mighty total,
Of mankind was never worse
For acts well meant towards it,
I embalm his tale in verse,
With all its windy passion,
Thoughtless thinking, speech uncouth;
For some will hear within them
A wild harmony of truth.

The Tale.

I LOVED; saw hope; then said so; learned that Lilian
loved again.

Wherefore speak of joy then suffer'd? My head
throbs, and I would fain

Find words to lay the spectre starting now before
my brain.

You will think Love paints the portrait I shall give:
no, that were base!—

You will find it cannot be, friend, and you'll bear
with me in case

Tears come:—I feel them coming, by the smarting
in my face.

A foolish weakness sometimes makes them rise at
my own voice.—

Let's forget I love no longer!—So!—Your heart
shall now rejoice

With beauty, or, at bidding, it shall grieve and
have no choice.

She loved ; words, all things told it; eye to eye,
and palm to palm.

As the pause upon the ceasing of a thousand-voiced
psalm,

Was the mighty satisfaction, and the full eternal
calm.

She could see me coming to her with the vision of
the hawk;

Always hastened on to meet me, heavy passion in
her walk;

Low tones to me grew lower, sweetening so her
honey talk,

That it filled up all my hearing; drown'd the voices
of the birds,
The voices of the breezes, and the voices of the
herds;
For to me the lowest ever were the loudest of her
words.

A paleness, as of beauty fainting through its own
excess

But how discourse of features whose least action
could express
What, while it made them lovely, far surpass'd all
loveliness!

Even when alone together; looks, no utterance can
define,

Mark'd now and then soul-wanderings, that con-
firm'd her half-divine:

High treasure, ten times treasured for not seeming
wholly mine!

On her face, then and for ever, was the seriousness
within.

Her sweetest smiles (and sweeter did a lover never
win)

Ere half-done grew so absent, that they made her
fair cheek thin.

On her face, then and for ever, thoughts unworded
used to live;

So that when she whisper'd to me, "Better joy
earth cannot give"—

Her lips, though shut, continued, "But earth's joy
is fugitive."

For there a nameless something, though suppressed,
still spread around;

The same was on her eye-lids if she looked towards
the ground;

When she spoke, you knew directly that the same
was in the sound;

A fine dissatisfaction, which at no time went
away,
But mingled with her laughter, even at its brightest
play,
Till it touched you like the sunshine in the closing
of the day.

This still and saint-like beauty, and a difference
between
Our years, (she numbered twenty—mine were
scarcely then eighteen,)
Made my love the blind idolatry which it could not
else have been.

Her presence was the garden where my soul breathed
heavenly free,
And lived in naked silence, and felt no per-
plexity.
When alone with Time I killed him, with a wild
and headlong glee,

In playing music she had played, that the keys
might be the same
Which she had touched before me; or in pencilling
her name,
With pointed glories round it, on the nearest things
that came;

Or in fifty similar follies, fit to make the wise world
laugh:
But you and I know better: the sweet kernels, life's
true staff,
We know are in the trifles which the wise world
takes for chaff.

—I now thought earthly fortune had attained its
utmost height:
The things we cannot fathom we imagine in-
finite.
I soon found that perfecting means confiding a
delight:

One day my Lilian told me she had met, by happy
chance,

A formerly-lov'd companion: he was fresh from
sprightly France,

And, with many volumes laden—essay, poem, and
romance—

Was, at her father's bidding, come to dwell with
them awhile.

“He has heard of you,” said Lilian, with a slow and
speaking smile,

“And, judging you from your friendships, would
have place among the file.”

We met.—His name was Winton — Am I pale,
friend ? something ran,

Like death, through all my body.—Now it's over.—

If I can,

I'll sketch, from after insight, some faint picture of
this man.

He had learnt, in well-taught boyhood, under quick
and watchful eyes,
Doctrines a sharp mind led him first to doubt, and
then despise.
Better to be greatly foolish, than to be so little
wise!

When free, all healthy study was put by, that he
might rush
To his favourite books—French chiefly—that his
blood might boil and gush
Over scenes which set his visage glowing crimson
—not a blush.

His heart, placed right by Heaven, was to Heaven
once akin;
Now changed to stone;—less, truly, by degrading
act, than in
Too curious contemplation of the sole Medusa,
Sin.

To this effect, however, those who knew him best
were blind;
Feeling, so suddenly frozen, left its lineaments
behind;
And passionate language, working a deceit but half
design'd,

And lips, still most expressive, though deform'd
with quoting French,
Were tools that texts of all sorts from their proper
aims could wrench—
Clothing, after Gallic models, baseless thoughts in
words that clench.

—I loved, the hour I saw him; in part for the man
he seem'd;
In part because my Lilian loved his talk, which she
esteem'd,
As she said,—and I opposed not,—for the thought
with which it teem'd.

(For even when he utter'd common things and
clear to sight,
He look'd at you so intently that you hardly
thought them trite;
A trick of serious manner wherein women much
delight.)

Faith in him, ten years my senior, daily, hourly
strengthen'd. Naught
Flatters youth like such a friendship: brief ac-
quaintance therefore wrought
A confidence unbounded, and, I then believed, un-
sought.

He heard with patience always, sometimes join'd,
with seeming heat,
The unvaried round of praises lovers love so to
repeat:
Lilian, each assured the other, was most lavishly
complete.

And he very soon discovered that it gave me joy
above

All other things, to tell me how (no news!) my
passion throve.

Repetitions never tedious! sweet tautologies of
love!

When, for such honey'd moments, I, through half
the restless night,

Lay thanking this kind Winton, then my bliss was
at its height;

I then found that perfecting means confiding a
delight.

—But let none ask joy at the highest, save those
who would have it end:

There's weight in earthly pleasures; they are earthy,
and they tend,

By sure, though hidden impulse, at their highest, to
descend.

Delights were still remaining—hate—shame—rage
—I can't tell what—

Comes to me at their memory: none that, more or
less, was not

The soul's unconscious incest on creations self-
begot!

But I talk too fast—and scarcely can remember
why I talk.

Every little recollection is a stumbling-stone, to
balk

The progress of my story, which is like a drunkard's
walk.

O! Friend, if you had seen her! heard her speaking,
felt her grace,

When serious looks seem'd filling with the smiles
which, in a space,

Broke, sweet as sabbath sunshine, and lit up her
shady face!

Try to conceive her image:—does it make your
brain reel round?

—But all of this is over.—Well, Friend, various
signs (I found
Too late, on rumination) then and thenceforth did
abound,

Wherefrom, but that all lovers look too closely to
see clear,

I might have gather'd matter fit for just and
jealous fear.

From her face the nameless something now began
to disappear;

The wandering thoughts unworded that once made
her half divine.

Yet, fairest with, without these she looked more
completely mine;

So I thought this shew'd love's increase:—truly
read, 'twas love's decline.

What I felt for her I often told her boldly to her
face:—

Blushes used to blush at blushes, flushing on in
glowing chase!

But latterly she listened, bending, full of bashful
grace:

It was to hide those blushes, I thought then, but I
suspect

It was to hide their absence. Once I said I could
detect

Higher purity in her daily; and she did not then
affect

To blush, but did blush, wholly:—such a blush,
when frost first nips,

Paints vine-leaves. Then her eyelids closed as slow
as an eclipse.

She knew she had been lying, though 'twas through
another's lips.

Her voice grew louder, losing the much meaning it
once bore;

The passion in her carriage, though it every day
grew more,

Was now the same to all men; and that was not so
before.

And grosser signs, far grosser, I remember now;
but these

I missed of course, and counted with those light
anomalies

Too frequent to disturb us into searching for their
keys.

Kindness at last grew effort. Then I *should* have
seen a flaw:

Love's duties are spontaneous—oh, Love's law is
perfect law,

And does the things it dictates, and descends not to
a saw!

But the faith I had in Lilian was a strong thing to
destroy.

Moreover, as, in manhood, half the moments you
enjoy

Are memories of others something like them when
a boy,

So, faith wanting, I might still have through the
present seen the past,

Long taking one for the other; feeling sure my hold
was fast

On that of which the symbols weakened daily.
But, at last,—

As, when we watch bright cloud-banks round about
the low sun ranged,

We suddenly remember some rich glory gone, or
changed,—

All at once the knowledge struck me that her love
had grown estranged.

From this time forward, glimpses of a dreadful
truth came on:

They came, but, how I know not, were no sooner
come than gone.

—At times some link of harmony seems missing, and
we, anon,

Remember states of living ended ere we left the
womb,

And see an awful something flashing to us from the
tomb—

The zodiac light of new states, dash'd tremendously
with gloom.

We tremble for an instant, and a single instant
more

Brings absolute oblivion, and we push on as be-
fore.—

Even thus those dreadful glimpses came, and startled,
and were o'er.

(All this to you, a poet! You once said, "A poet's
art
Lies in tolerating wholly, and accounting for in
part,
By one heart's subtle movements those of every
other heart.")

The change I saw in Lilian I had no time to
bemoan,
But combatted conviction, till 'twas almost over-
thrown.
No falsehoods so effectual to deceive us as our
own!

Even the dreadful glimpses now began to fade
away,
And disappear'd completely, when my Lilian asked,
one day,
If I knew what reason Winton had to make so long
a stay

In England. "For," said Lilian, with untroubled countenance,

"Winton of course has told you of the Love he left in France."—

I seized her hand, and kissed it: joy had left no utterance.

—I know that there are many so skill'd in the world that none

Can fool them—not even women, be they glorious as the sun,

And lie unto sphere music;—but I'm glad that I'm not one.—

I marvell'd, at the moment, why Winton himself forbore

To tell me this; but Lilian was in tears: I thought no more,

And fuller calm came to me than I ever felt before.

Another calm so perfect I should think is only
shed
On good men dying gently, who recal a life well
led,
Till they cannot tell, for sweetness, if they be alive
or dead.

I'll stop here. You already have, I think, divined
the rest.
There's a prophetic moisture in your eyes:—yet,
tears being blest
And delicate nutrition, apt to cease, too much sup-
press'd,

I'll go on; but less for your sake than my own:
—my skin is hot,
And there's an arid pricking in my veins; their
currents clot:
Tears sometimes soothe such fever, where the letting
of blood will not.

I often tell my story to myself, to make them
come;

And, as I think of this part, thought grows wild; it
seems to numb

My reason:—'twill be now so.—Shall I speak,
friend, or be dumb?

You'll hear? Pause then, an instant, so that you
may understand.—

The glimpses which I spoke of, never had as yet
been fanned

Into distinct suspicion: they could scarcely have
been scanned

Clear enough, had I will'd it, being general
lumour, thrown .

From many a light, too little to be recognised
alone.

Besides, they were possessions which I always
feared to own;

I ventured not to word them, even in my secret
mind :

And thoughts pass off like flavours, or like scents,
if unconsign'd

In language to the memory—not an impress stays
behind.

Between my soul and Winton's there had long been
a divorce,

Of which, you see, I chose not to investigate the
source;

My friendship then recovered, of itself, its ancient
force.

And (now that I remember!) neither then nor all
that while,

Did he mark these revolutions: as of old, an eager
smile

Came when we talked of Lilian, and we talked in
the old style.

One morning—are you listening?—One fair morning,
he and I,
As we rode across the country, met a friend of his.
His eye
Caught Winton's—who rode past him.—“What!”
said he, “pass old friends by!

“So! I've heard your suit's successful? Truly, stuff
for a romance
After your favourite fashion. But, ah! ha! should
Percy chance—”
“Nay, Percy's here,” said Winton, pointing towards
me, with a glance

Of easy smiles, and adding something—I've for-
gotten. Then
This passed off; and soon after I went home, and
took a pen,
And put down what I've told you,—how it happened,
where, and when;

And, having read it over once or twice, sat down to
think;

From time to time, beneath it, writing more; till,
link by link,

The chain I've partly shewn you was complete. I
did not shrink,

But read it all together, and I found it was no
dream!

What I felt I can't remember—an oblivion which
the gleam

Of light that now comes through it shews for
blessedness extreme.

—At last I moved, exclaiming, “I shall not believe,
until

I've spoken more with Lilian.” Thereon all my
heart grew still:

For man's belief is active, and a matter of the
will.

I sought my love. She started—I suppose that I
was pale.

We talked; but words, on both sides, seemed to
sicken, flag, and fail.

Then I gave her what I'd written, watching whether
she would quail.

In and out flew sultry blushes. So, when red re-
flections rise

From conflagrations, filling the alarm'd heart with
surmise,

They lighten now, now darken, up and down the
spacious skies.

She finished once; but fearing to look from it, read
it o'er

Ten times at least. Poor Lilian! had those readings
been ten score,

That refuge from confusion had confused thee more
and more.

I turn'd a volume,—waiting her full leisure to
reply.

The book was one which Winton had asked me to
read, and I

Had stopped half way, for horror, lest my soul
should putrify.

“Behold!” said I,—“from this time, back to that
time, when, from France,

With many volumes laden, essay, poem and ro-
mance,

Smooth Winton came,—the riddle's all unriddled at
a glance!”

She heard me; saw how surely my convictions now
were built;

So stood at bay, depending on that crutch made
like a stilt,

The impudent vulgarity wherewith women outstare
guilt.

"By what right is it," said she, "you are here to question me?"

There! take your rude indictment, which acknowledges the plea

Of common love now cancell'd. Truly, sir, the times are free;

When ladies must not venture, in appearance, to requite

Some foolish boy's first passion, for their own or his delight,

Lest he, a man, hatch insult—pleading perhaps his 'wrong' his right!"

"No wrong — no wrong!" I answer'd, breaking short this senseless throng

Of words, which shew'd she dreaded accusation loud
and long.

"Beside your's, mine is nothing. Your's, oh! Lilian, is the wrong.

"Love ends where wrong commences; and, with
love, love's wrong must end.

I've lost—ah! what, love losing, you've lost power
to comprehend.

I urge no wrong."—Then, finding all her baseless
pride unbend,

I said, "You're ill; sit, Lilian." And she sat
down, and was meek.

"Ah! tears? Not lost to God, then. But, pray,
Lilian, do not speak:

I understand you better by the moisture on your
cheek.

"You loved me fondly, Lilian—Yes, I see—but
do not cry:

The force, I know, was wielded very subtly, to
defy

Truth, like a tower time-strengthen'd, and to turn
it to a lie.

“ Don’t speak! You would not have me unacquainted with what led
To this result? No! listen, and let *me* relate what
bred
Thy tears and cheapen’d chasteness—(we may talk
now as if wed).

“ This book here, that lay open when I came in
unaware,
Is not the first—I thought so!—but the last of
many a stair
Of easy fall. Such only could have led you to his
lair.

“ These drugs, at first, had scarcely strength to move
your virgin blood;
They slowly rose in action, till they wrought it to a
flood,
Fit for their giver’s purpose, who—who turn’d it
into mud!”

She shook with tears, in silence. I, yet checking
passion's sway,
Said simply, " Good by, Lilian;" and got up, and
strode away;
For I knew that she would make me weep before
her, should I stay.

—Now followed the revulsion. Passion changed me
to a beast.

—You know how I hate passion. Fair is foul, with
passion pieced.

Of good things miscall'd passions, surely love is
passion least.

What passion is in marriage—type of perfect love
on earth?

The *passion*, ' love,' is really sense of love oppos'd
—love's dearth:

Even good, if born of passion, is it not a bastard
birth?

Yet I—I, knowing all this—I—was vulgar passion's
slave—

Would lie and roll, as brutes do; sick of that, would
up and rave;—

Weep, like a peevish woman balk'd of what her
fancies crave;—

Stoop to thirst for present vengeance,—which I
knew I could not sate

Without including Lilian; still ceas'd not to meditate.

Gratuitous self-torturer! Deepest hell is hopeless
hate!

I madly ask'd, "Where's Justice?" Found no answer in the text—

Self-wrong is paid in this world, wrong to others in
the next.

—But time makes grief less grievous: now my mind
is less perplex'd.

We know there must be justice! Else what man
could breathe his breath,
Except to suffocation? Hear the promise—what it
saith
Fact-proved—in life are many that foretaste the
perfect death!

For this, kind Heaven, I thank thee:—O! thou dost
not let us burst
Through sense of man's oppression:—the oppressor
shall be curst.
Thank, thank thee! How I thank thee! Thank-
ing seems to slake my thirst.

In the pride of words I question'd—shall death
limitless requite
Wrong limited? Thank, thank thee! I see now
with better sight.
We are the fools of language;—every wrong is
infinite.

Pardon, Heaven! that I doubted whether there was
any hell.

O! but now I do believe it! Firmly, firmly! I
foretell

Of one that shall rank high there: he's a scoffer,
and must dwell

Where worms are—ever gnawing scoffers' hearts
into belief;

Where weepings, gnashings, wailings, thirstings,
groanings, ghastly grief,

For ever and for ever pay the price of pleasures
brief;

Where Gallios, who while living knew but cared
for none of these,

Now amazed with shame, would gladly, might it
God (Fate there) appease,

Watch and pray a million cycles for a single mo-
ment's ease;

Where—Enough! my petty fancy, dreaming trifles
sense-begot!

But thou art just, great Father! I will pray while
I am hot.

Oh, let this—Wherefore stop me? Right! friend,
right!—let this be not!

Ay, scorn me! I have earn'd it. But I said how
it would be.

Fool! to passion against passion, and in face of that
to flee

Forthwith into its shackles, spouting mad im-
piety!

Ah! but had you known my Lilian! (a sweet name?)

Indeed, indeed,

I doted on my Lilian. None can praise her half her
meed.

Perfect in soul; too gentle—others' need she made
her need;

Quite passionless, but ever bounteous-minded even
to waste;

Much tenderness in talking; very urgent, yet no
haste;

And chastity—to laud it would have seemed almost
unchaste.

Graced highly, too, with knowledge; vers'd in
tongues; a queen of dance;

An artist at her playing; a most touching utter-
ance

In song: her lips' mild music could make sweet the
clack of France.

France?—Ah, friend, much I've followed what I
meant should be my theme!

A little more!—So quiet in her ways; a pride
supreme

In truth—that can't be neither:—*no* more!—this is
a dreamt dream.

And, good friend, judge this doting mad re-action
of mad rage.

—I fled from love and Lilian, as I've said; tried to
engage

My thought,—intending sometimes to forget grief;
so assuage.

I now and then succeeded: but—forgetfulness too
sweet!

It startled with its sweetness—thus involved its own
defeat;

And every time this happened with it brought a full
repeat

Of the pain upon discovery. So, at length, I learned
by heart,

And never, save when sleeping, suffered henceforth
to depart

The knowledge of my sorrow; and in time this
soothed its smart.

Great sorrows are not lasting : they can kill, or
drive us mad,
Or leave a way of talking that will make the hearer
sad;
But they are never lasting—not even such as I
have had.

For, evermore, Grief's offspring kill their mother;
at least so
I've found: I thank kind Heaven, woe-bought wisdom
has made woe
Seem light,—when I remember what it was two
years ago.

But often even now friend, in my leisure, in the
thick
Of other thoughts, unchalleng'd, words and looks
come crowding quick—
Good friend! they did this morning, till the sun-
shine made me sick.

Yet that's not much. This sorrow is not selfish; and
the tear

Of pity hath a sweetness, among sweets, without its
peer:

Souls sainted, by such sadness lift themselves from
sphere to sphere.

Epilogue.

He ended: all his passion
 Had consumed itself in speech;
And now a silence followed
 Which was understood by each.
At last he look'd around him,
 Smiled, discoursed of common things.
Then boldly and abruptly
 Touched again on tender strings.

He lost his story's purpose
 In the sense of its relief;
Grew garrulous in praising
 All the kind effects of grief,
And told the pithy maxims
 It had taught him: thus they ran—
“We love God first in Nature;
 Then in Woman; last in Man.”—

“ At best, the heart of woman
Is a narrow depth.”—“ For aye,
Grief’s growth, like that of fungus,
Hath its essence in decay.”
With many others—worded
From the life that’s only had
By having lived. These finish’d,
All his countenance turn’d glad;

For perfect vent for sorrow
Is in words (as doth aver
The many-moral’d story
Of the bright-eyed Mariner.)
The facing a dead evil
Frights the spectre to its shroud;
And, franchised thus, my dreamer
Dreamt a dream like this, aloud:—

"Our foe once more is working,
But with pen in place of lance.
And is the hope of conquest
With our England, or with France?
The question, for the first time,
Should be thought upon in dread;
For Fear, it is, not Valour,
That must bruise the serpent's head.

"Dear country! Noble England!
Pause awhile! the stake is vast.
The Present bears a Future
Which has no type in the Past.
Through coming revolutions,
Through an age or two of storm,
Behold that giant Future
Left for thee, in chief, to form!

“ Mark well the wondrous changes—

Mark the ends towards which we climb;
Results that nought can frustrate,
Save the stopping short of time.
Ere long the sun of knowledge
Must produce a nightless day;
Ere long the curse of Babel
Shall have worn itself away.

“ Then art, man’s proper nature,

Shall become an active life;
And blessed births must follow
The approaching death of strife.
Let War once cease to root up
Re-production in her rage,
What fruits may come of nations’
Lying fallow for an age!

“The wheels are now revolving
Which must work all this, and more;
The hearts of common people
Swelling now with precious lore;
The rustic hasting homeward,
To his Paper from the plough;
And books, that will be henceforth
What they never were till now.

“The outward eye turns inward,
Slowly wedding fact to fact;
Such harmonized experience
Making knowledge, knowledge act.
While all of this progresses
Sense is weakly, vision thick,
Sin itself has little savour,
And the soul of man lies sick.

" The creeping thing has dwindled
To a grub, that it may fly;
And those who stand and calmly
Watch the Present, can descry,
Upon its corpse-like surface—
In its dead, mechanic strife—
The blind, uneasy motions
That precede the higher life.

" The vital warmth, the leaven,
The condition of this birth,
Is hearted here, in England.
Therefore, England! watch thy worth;
Keep bright the truth that's left thee;
Hold suspicious the advance
Of every foreign spirit,
But especially of France.

“ With thy soul’s eye see the Present

Not alone the Past’s cold tomb.

It is that, but it is also

A true chrysalis—all womb.

Then look forth to the Future!

Till that haven’s won, be thou

The great world’s rudder always,

And, when possible, its prow.”



SONNET I.

MY childhood was a vision heavenly wrought ;
Vast joys, of which I sometimes dream, yet fail
To recollect sufficient to bewail,
And now for ever seek, came then unsought.
But thoughts denying feeling,—every thought
Some buried feeling's ghost, a spirit pale,—
Sprang up, and wordy nothings could prevail
In juggle with my soul. Since, better taught:
Truth-seeing contemplation, light that solves
Doubts without logic, rose in logic's room.
Then faith came back, and hope, that faith involves;
And joys—rare stars! which though they not illumine
The clouded night, have glory that dissolves
And strikes to quick transience all its gloom.

SONNET II.

Nor wholly for the few in whom thou hast
Trust for strong judgment, work ; nor wholly cling
To gaudy popularity, whose wing
Was never made for flight. Fame's perfect blast
Wants undivided breath. Wise they who cast
For both ; wisest who neither serve, but sing
Verse motive-void as Pythia's muttering ;
For poets are the prophets of the past.
Rich Spenser, deep-toned Wordsworth, Chaucer green,
Shakspere, and mighty Milton, sought their fame
First in their own approval : we have seen
How the world's followed. Then seek thou the same,
If, Poet, thou wouldst be what those have been,
And live for ever in a laurelled name.

SONNET III.

At nine years old I was Love's willing Page :
Poets love earlier than other men,
And would love later, but for the prodigal pen.
"Oh! wherefore hast thou, Love, ceased now to engage
Thy servitor, found true in every stage
Of all the eleven Springs gone by since then?"
Vain quest!—and I, no more Love's denizen,
Sought the pure leisure of the Golden Age.
But lately wandering, from the world apart,
Chance brought me where, before her quiet nest,
A village-girl was standing without art.
My soul sprang up from its lethargic rest,
The slack veins tightened all across my heart,
And love once more was aching in my breast.

SIR HUBERT.

Prologue.

O Love, by all beloved,
Lovely Love, that comes to all!
The world is pressing on me;
Help me, Love, or I must fall!
My soul is sick within me;
Give me strength to fly the thrall—

The darkness which I suffer—
Shade forecast from perfect death.
O, my desire is to thee!
Breathe upon me living breath;
Some part of that make actual
Which my soul remembereth!

—Love's one to all: to Heaven,
Mistress, father, friend, or wife;
And what's not love is evil;
For "the way, the truth, the life,"
Is, God declares, love only;
Other ways, guilt, grief, and strife.

Time was that blushes started
If I took Love's name in vain;
My soul was Love's pure priestess,
And my body Love's pure fane.
O precious time!—thrice precious,
That it cannot come again.

Years, bearing much love from me,
Left me happy; I could still
Call spirits—potent spirits—
Could at all times have my fill
Of love, by mere volition:
Youth, through faith, is strong to will.

Now, heart, how is it with thee?
Wholly impotent to pray,
Thou sleep'st, the slave of motives
Thou shouldst rule, and not obey!
But, hot thoughts! blindly striving
To get good things upon clay,

First warm that clay to being;—
Search through memory; from the throng
Of time-bequeathed stories
Choose some passion, sane and strong;
Soul, try to see it strongly,
And arouse thyself to song.

Who help themselves, God helpeth;
But the boon pray'd and the pray'r
Are one—both, therefore, Heaven's:
Man's sole place is, to prepare
The path, through which Heaven leads him,
Then, before he is aware.

I'll work once more to clear it!
Will shall conquer will: I'll sing,
Though minded more for weeping,
Till from song song's temper spring;
For that is love's.—My story
Be of love, without its wing;

Of steady love well guerdon'd;
Of as much as I may scan,
Through dim and tarnish'd knowledge,
Of God's earthly perfect plan,
The melody of woman
Making harmony with man.

Sir Hubert.

I.

*Ah ! who would not be Hubert,
For his birth and bearing fine ;
His rich sky-skirted woodlands ;
Valleys, flowing oil and wine ;—
Sir Hubert, to whose sunning
All the rays of fortune shine ?*

Thus many talk'd of Hubert.

Many others warm'd in praise
Of Hubert, the pure-hearted,
Than whom none went on his ways
Less tempted of temptations ;
Whom no peril could amaze.

But Hubert to sweet woman
Was the standard by which worth
Of every sort was measured:
So that many maids, for dearth
Of such a man to woo them,
Love foreswore, and with it mirth.

At foot of one fair altar
Offer'd he his sighs, and chose
To love a large-eyed maiden
Of sixteen:—Sweet years! that close
The promise and completion,
Like the ripe buds of a rose!

She cared not for his sighing:—
“ Ah!” said some, “ earth’s best and chief
Miss always earthly guerdons!”
—Better suits it my belief
That God holds such men worthy
To be glorified by grief.

Now Hubert, finding Mabel

Did not love him, thought it best

Neither to urge directly,

Nor to wholly drop his quest;

Because love yet might burgeon

With her yet unburgeon'd breast.

Sir Hubert, therefore, order'd

Sumptuous banquets and rich shows,

In Lady Mabel's honour.

Partly, that they might dispose

Her young heart well towards him;

Partly for, if thence arose

Small profit to his love-suit,

At the least she should partake

Delight of his producing.

—'Twas a thought had power to make,

Of poverty, proud splendour,

Could it come for her rich sake!

It came—unseen—uncared for.

With his hopes, which daily fled,

Fled joy in his possessions ;

So the news in one day spread,
Of Hubert's fortunes bankrupt,
And of Mabel richly wed.

II.

Sir Hubert knew much better

Than to carp at Heaven's will.

Although he could escape not

From that load which seem'd to fill
And heave about his bosom,
Like material weight, he still

Could banish Mabel's image,

He was certain;—that he would
Was, to him, the simple sequence
Of the power: because the good
Perceive one meaning only
In the words—should, would, and could.

He went forth from the city

Where she dwelt, to one poor farm,—
All left of all his valleys;
There, Sir Hubert's single arm
Met Hubert's wants; and labour
Lost its hardship in its charm:

Much action eased the burthen,

And the everlasting freight
He bore within his bosom;
But his bosom grew elate,
And light as air, on thinking,
Of what led to this estate!

Moreover, he discover'd
That the Heaven-establish'd task,
Direct and serious seeking
For the bread we daily ask,
Strikes clear the face of Nature
From an unsuspected mask.

And glad was he, accustom'd
To the state, almost, of kings,
To now find purest waters
In the simplest wayside springs;
And novelties, twice novel,
Because seen in common things.

All these results together
Wrought, in time, a total peace:
He could walk and think of Mabel,
And his pace would not increase;
He often, therefore, did so.
—Not that love does ever cease:

Who say, when somewhat distanced
From its heat and grosser might,
"Love's brand burns us no longer—
It is out!" use not their sight:
For ever and for ever
We are lighted by the light.

Before there be extinguish'd
One minutest flame, love-fann'd,
The Pyramids of Egypt
Shall have no place in the land,
But as a nameless portion
Of its ever-shifting sand.

III.

From his fortune's ruins, Hubert
Had retained one hawk, whose flight
And form had made it precious
Even at his fortune's height;
A thousand-fold more precious
Was it now: for Hubert's plight

None other friend or servant
Chose to share; but, day by day,
This hawk would, while affording
Relaxation noble, slay
The meal for which, not seldom,
Hubert lack'd the power to pay.

It served him, too, of evenings:

On a sudden he would rise,
From books or simple music,
And awake his hawk's large eyes,
(Almost as large as Mabel's,)
Teasing out its dumb replies,

In sulky sidelong glances,

And reluctantly flapp'd wings,
Or looks of slow communion,
To the lightsome questionings
That broke the drowsy sameness,
And the sense, like fear, which springs

At night, when we are conscious

Of our distance from the strife
Of cities; and the memory
Of the spirit in all things rife,
Endues the chairs and tables
With a disagreeable life.

It went abroad—Should Mabel
Wed again, her spacious land,
The wealth of her dead husband,
By his latest breathed command,
Belong'd all to the infant
He had left: so Mabel's hand

Was not for Hubert's seeking;
For, if possible to thought
That she would then have loved him,
None the more would he have sought
An unimagined treasure,
Whose bestowal might have brought

No treasure to its giver:
For, to her, what would suffice
To crown him with contentment,
Would be poor.—The Man describes,
Where Woman knows but discord,
Often mightiest harmonies;

And Hubert thought—Though Mabel
 Could, perhaps, become resign'd
To live, like him, quite simply,
 She would never, like him, find
That poverty is riches,
 Only of another kind.

The air of resignation
 Had, thought he, too much of gloom
For wedded love to flower,
 And let forth its soft perfume:
Love, unfulfill'd, was fearless,
 Like the wild hedge-primrose bloom;

Wed,—like an evening primrose,
 That folds up, and is afraid,
Except in utter calmness
 And pure peace; but is display'd
Of afternoons, when peaches
 Cool their angry cheeks in shade.

V.

He gather'd consolation,
As before, where best he might:
But though there was the difference
That he now could claim a right
To grieve as much as pleased him,
It was six years, since his sight

Had fed on Mabel's features,
So that Hubert scarcely knew
What traits to give the vision
Which should fill his eyes with dew:—
For she must needs, by that time,
Have become another, who,

In girlhood's triple glory
 (For a higher third outflows
Whenever Promise marries
 With Completion,) troubled those
That saw, with trouble sweeter
 Than the sweetest of repose.

It, therefore, was the business
 Of his thoughts to try to trace
The probable fulfilment
 Of her former soul and face,—
From buds deducing blossoms.
 For, although an easy space

Led from the farm of Hubert,
 To where Mabel's castle stood,
Closed in, a league on all sides,
 With wall'd parks, and wealthy wood,
No chance glimpse could be look'd for,
 So recluse her widowhood.

Hence seasons past, and Hubert
Earn'd his bread, but leisure spent
In loved dissatisfaction,
Which he made his element
Of choice, as much as, till then,
He had sought it in content.

VI.

One day, as Hubert rested
From his labour, spade in hand,
There came a sense of glory,
And he look'd around the land;
And he, and all he look'd at,
Seem'd to brighten and expand.

The wind had just arisen,
And the airy skies were rife
With flocks of perfect cloudlets,
And the trees were all in strife,
Extravagantly triumphing
At their newly-gotten life.

Birds wrangled in the branches
With a sweet, confused noise;
Even the earnest cuckoo,
Judging wisest to rejoice,
Shook round his "cuckoo, cuckoo,"
As if careless of his voice.

But Hubert leant and listen'd
To the glory in his breast.
The first glow turn'd to passion,
But he nursed it, unexpress'd,
And glory gilding glory
Turn'd at last to sunny rest.

Then again he look'd around him,
Like an angel, and, behold!
The scene was changed—no cloudlets
Cross'd the serious blue; but (roll'd
Behind the breathing mountains)
Watch'd tumultuous piles of gold.

The wind, too, was abated,
And the trees and birds had grown
As watchful as the clouds were;
Right above the bright sun shone,
Down looking from the forehead
Of the giant sky, alone.

Then a nightingale, perhaps waking
At the stillness, shot a throng
Of notes into the sunshine;
First with care, then swift and strong;
Then he madly struck them round him,
Till the bright air throb'd with song;

And suddenly grew silent
All amid his ecstasies:—
Laurels rustle! What sees Hubert?
Sight is sceptic, but swift knees
Acknowledge Lady Mabel,
As she issues from the trees!

VII.

For a little, she stood speechless,
And the gorgeous vision seem'd
To sate the air with beauty;
Then she spoke, and Hubert dream'd
Of voices giving glory
To the utterly redeem'd.

“ Sir Hubert!”—and, that instant,
Mabel saw the fresh light flush
Out of her rosy shoulders,
And perceived her sweet blood hush
About her, till, all over,
There shone forth a sumptuous blush—

“ Sir Hubert, I have sought you,
Unattended, to request
A boon—the first I ever
Have entreated.” Then she press’d
Her small hand’s weight of whiteness
To her richly-sloping breast,

But said on, blushing brighter:
“ The demand I have to make,
You must believe, Sir Hubert,
Cannot be for my own sake;
For that, too much already
You have spent.” And as she spake,

She look'd at his poor homestead,
At the tool, dropt from his hand;
Then suddenly it cross'd her,
How immense was the demand
Which she was here for urging.
Yet, what grief, should he withstand!

Tears came. "But since," thought Mabel,
"It is said—Time cannot mar
The depth of genuine kindness,—
And because the tenderest star
That tries the April twilight
Is more bold than lovers are,

"I'll stay and dine with Hubert,—
So to offer space and pause
For hope to re-illumine.
Gentle heavens! that see the flaws
In every human action,
Pardon this one, for the cause!"

Then (by her looks, whose meaning
She half wished him to divine,
Confessing her confusion,
And unfitness for design)
She said that she was wearied
With her walk—would stay to dine,

And name her wishes after.

She grew silent.—Oh, her mouth
Was sweet beyond new honey,
Or the bean-perfumed south,
And better than pomegranates
To a pilgrim dumb for drouth.

VIII.

How was it with Sir Hubert?

—Beggary language! I could burst
For impotence of effort:

Those who made thee were accurst!
Dumb men were gods were all dumb.
But go on, and do thy worst!—

His life-blood stopp'd to listen—

Her delivering lips dealt sound—
Oh! hungrily he listen'd;
But the meaning meant was drown'd;
For, to him, her voice and presence
Meaning held far more profound.

He gave his soul to feasting,
And his sense, (which is the soul
More thoroughly incarnate)
Backward standing, to control
His object, as a painter
Views a picture in the whole.

She stood, her eyes cast downwards,
And, upon them, dropp'd half-way,
Lids, sweeter than the bosom
Of an unburst lily, lay,
With black abundant lashes,
To keep out the upper day.

A breath from out her shoulders
Made the air cool, and the ground
Was greener in their shadow;
All her dark locks loll'd, unbound,
About them, heavily lifted
By the breeze that struggled round.

As if from weight of beauty,
Gently bent...but oh, how draw
This thousand-featured splendour—
Thousand-featured without flaw!—
At last, his vision revelling
On her ravishing mouth, he saw

It closed; and then remembered
That she spoke not.—“Stay to dine,
And name her wishes after”—
To these sounds he could assign
A sense, for still he heard them,
Echoing silvery and divine.—

Now Hubert summons knowledge—
Asks forgiveness, fearfully,
For his too much attention—
Says, it is his misery
That he must lose her presence,
Even a moment; yet to be

Her servant almost mends it :—

Her repast he must prepare
Himself ;—so leaves the garden,

And, that instant, is aware
That he has nought to give her,
Nought wherewith to purchase fare,

No friend, of whom to borrow,

No one near, of whom to claim
The tax, and force its payment
In his passion's sovereign name ;—
Nought seen, at any turning,
But unsufferable shame!

Too late to fly his falcon!

Which, as if it would assist
Its master's sorrow, perches
On his vaguely-offer'd fist,
With busy, dumb caresses,
Sidling up along his wrist.

—Lo! now a short confusion,
And a kind of dim dismay,
Flit over Hubert's features;
Now, as wishing to assay
The weight of his fat falcon,
Up and down does Hubert play

The bird, and, in an instant,
Takes it from its living stand,
Grasps all its struggling body
With the strength of the left hand,
And, with the right, he kills it;
And its eyes, so broad and bland,

Will never meet Sir Hubert's
Any more, nor find him food.
He plucks it now—now roasts it;
And now, in a merry mood,
Leads Mabel to the dinner,
And forespeaks it passing good.

IX.

When Mabel and blithe Hubert
Had well eaten of the hawk,
And of the garden's fruitage,
Season'd all with gracious talk,
They rose, and left the table,
And went out again to walk,

At Mabel's wish;—for Hubert
Could not then observe her eyes,
As he had done at dinner,
With such unrelax'd surprise,
The whole time she was speaking!
Much as if he could surmise

Her motive for remaining
So long with him, and for ways
So little to be look'd for
From her use in former days.
At length, sure now to prosper,
She begins her suit, and says,

That he can no more wonder
At her coming, when he learns
How all she has to cherish,
In the world, upon it turns:
Her little son, she tells him,
Even now with fever burns,

Which he can forthwith banish,
If he will:—her boy's decease,
She thinks, would cause hers also:—
Thus forecasting many a piece
Of truth most apt to touch him,
She unfolds how strong caprice,

That's nothing strange in children,
Bound her son, and seem'd to balk
All effort to destroy it:
Often had the child heard talk
About the unequall'd beauty,
And sure flight of Hubert's hawk,

And all day long he fretted,
And all night he kept awake,
Because he could not have it.
It was only for his sake
She came there—would Sir Hubert
Give his falcon for *her* sake?

X.

Thought she, "What ails Sir Hubert,
That his visage, just now bright
For hope of being able
Still to furnish me delight,
Changes, as I were changing
Into something fit for fright?

"As if a nightmare had him,
He stands powerless to speak—
With gaping lips and eyelids!—
Surely, surely this is weak
In such a man as Hubert!
Tears are flowing down his cheek!

“ If he would keep his falcon,
Why not say so?—But I see
That I was much mistaken
In Sir Hubert’s love to me!”
Then loud, and a little proudly,
“ Sir, be sure that you are free

“ To utter a refusal,
And offend not: nay, I feel
The extravagance of asking
So much worth from your own weal.”
Then cried Sir Hubert, vaguely,
“ Why, I kill’d it, for her meal!”

—“ Ah! much was I mistaken
In Sir Hubert’s love to me!”
She murmur’d; and her eyelids
Blush’d with tears, and two or three
Fell down the fair perfection
Of her face. And it must be

That they were not wept solely
For her proper loss. Her eyes
Dwelt calmly on Sir Hubert;
She allow'd new tears to rise,
Uncheck'd; and ever, through them,
Sweetly stream'd a soft surprise.

The truth at last felt fully,
Mabel summon'd will to say—
“For this magnificent banquet
I have eaten of to-day,
Sir Hubert, it much grieves me
I can make no fit repay;

“But if, sir, for the future,
We can meet as friends, my board
Will be as open to you
As it would were you its lord.”
Then she bow'd; and left him standing
From his stupor unrestored.

XL

Now, this time, he lost nothing
Of the things that Mabel said.
Yet time crept on; full labour
Just sufficed, his falcon dead,
To keep his roof above him,
And provide him daily bread.

And Mabel waited ever,
(For she saw his love unslack'd)
To hear of Hubert's coming.
But a woman has the tact
To estimate an action
She would not know how to act;

When, therefore, Hubert came not,
 She conceived the cause, and why
He hinted no new love-suit,
 —Which the petty-spirited fry
Said, was because the spirit
 Was too low—that was too high.

Still thought-engrossing visions
 Of the hand of Death, whose clutch
Seem'd close upon her infant,
 Did not let her mind dwell much
On Hubert's wealthy banquet,
 Or the want which made it such.

But now,—her infant vanish'd,
 And the astonishment all past,
Which Death, though we expect him,
 Not the less wakes at his blast;
And no sign left of weeping,
 But a gentle downward cast

Of silk-smooth lids, and whiter

Than unfallen flakes of snow,—

Remembrance came of Hubert.

“ Ah!” thought she, “ how do I know

But he may yet be fasting

For that feast he did bestow!

“ How comes it that I never

Have remembered this before!

But perhaps I can amend it.

I’ll send for him, and deplore

This oversight unto him;

And he *shall* accept good store

“ Of all that I can think of

Which will ease his life’s hard way.”

That very morn, as Hubert

Roughly work’d, came one to say

That, should it suit his leisure,

She would speak with him that day.

So, to the tower'd castle
Comes Sir Hubert.—Half reclined
Along a couch leans Mabel,
Deeply musing in her mind
Something her bosom echoes.
O'er her face, like breaths of wind

Upon a summer meadow,
Serious pleasures live; and eyes,
Large always, slowly largen,
As if some far-seen surprise
Approached;—then fully orb them,
At near sound of one that sighs.

XII.

“ Ah, Hubert! . Welcome Hubert!—
My thoughts were of you just now.”
—Then, but not quite so warmly,
“ And they were, Sir Hubert, how
To alleviate the burthen
Of the debts with which I bow.

“ Sit, sir, for you look wearied
By your walk: it wearied me.
I hoped to have had you oftener
For a guest; but now I see
That you are even prouder
Than they whisper you to be.

"You wanted formal asking—

Nay! deny not!"—And she ran
On talking, till a terror

Seem'd to take her, lest her plan
Should fail of forcing Hubert
To forget how she began,

And ceased at last, exhausted.

Then Sir Hubert straight replied,
With every noble courtesy,
To her words, and spoke, beside,
All things that are permitted
To mere friendship;—not in pride,

Or wilful overacting

Of the right, which often blends
Its sacrificial pathos,

Bitter-sweet, with lovers' ends;
Or that he recollected

Her command to "meet as friends:"

He dropt his eyes, for sadness,
From their worshipping. But, lo!
Upon her sable garments
They are fall'n! With progress slow,
Through sunny satisfaction
To sweet hope his features grow,

And, all at once, are lighted
With a light,—as when the moon,
Long labouring towards the margin
Of a cloud, aye seeming soon
About to swim beyond it,
Bursts, at last, as bare as noon.

“ Oh, hear me, Lady Mabel!
You might animate a clod
To speak. I have not spoken;
But in true paths have I trod:
Ah! I have loved you, Mabel,
And I also have loved God;—

“ And you much more for loving
Him beyond you. But I see
The time is now for utterance:
Lady Mabel, I would be
A man of joy—possess’d by
My possession—would wed thee.”

Her hands are woo’d with kisses;
They refuse not the caress.
Closer, closer, ever closer,
Vigorous lips for answer press!
Feasting the hungry silence,
Comes, sob-clad, a silver “ Yes.”

—*Ah! who would not be Hubert,
For his dark-eyed bride divine ;
Her rich, sky-skirted woodlands ;
Valleys, flowing oil and wine ;—
Sir Hubert, to whose sunning
All the rays of fortune shine?*

Epilogue.

This sober song is ended.

It has made my bosom well ;
And bosoms well see visions
Which it betters them to tell.
Clear-visaged truths uncall'd for
Come: I suit them to my shell.

The Muses are the helpmates
Of mankind—are born to be
Supporters of our moments
Slack in faith ; their deity
Is but our own reflected ;
Make them idols, and they flee ;

Or worse, remain as tyrants,
Who (most tyrant-like) employ
The power we give, against us,—
Killing that perpetual Boy
Which is the Man's best manhood,
With a jealous hate to joy.

And thence, although my heart throbs
Often hoping that, from thrall,
Man climbs up, through the centuries,—
Quite as often doth it pall
With fear, that they are spaces
Of his uncompleted fall.

Even now my spirit sickens
As I think how truth's prime staff
Fails through this idol-worship,—
What was corn becoming chaff.
The man that loves a woman
Loves his passion more than half;

He loves himself for loving ;
Hopes to thus divide the gain.
Love will not be divided,
And too late he finds, with pain,
That he has left Love's substance
To pursue its shadow vain.

It is the same in all things :
Our unfruitful feelings flow
Back on themselves for ever ;—
We thrive only when we sow
Our virtues freely round us,
All unweeting how they grow.

True Love began declining
When the God of Love was born :
To *Him*, not *Her*, the loved one,
Have man's vows, since then, been sworn.
But more of late than ever
There's of Love's best life to mourn:

Though now a man, as always,
For his mistress might divorce
Body and soul, the action
Would be tainted at its source
With self-congratulation—
Done no more of simple course.

The dignity of loving
Is deceased ; and it is hence
That marriage turns among us,
On a point of pounds and pence.
The instinct of a woman
Hates the whining impotence

Which marks a modern lover :
And the love, from Heaven brought,
To work the soul's redemption
From the sense, goes all for nought.
—Yet, as men are saved by hoping,
Why not Man? Look forward thought !

The bandage loosens slowly
From Love's eyes. Love falsely deems
To get fresh food by knowledge :—
But this brightest of my dreams,
That knowledge shall end knowledge,
Points my vision to where streams

A little wavering lumour,
Vanish'd now, now clear to ken—
The hidden Sun of Wisdom
Throwing up its dawn! And then
I see Love sway the sceptre
For a thousand years to men ;

Hear learning laugh'd at—knowing
Any truth, be it great or small,
A pin-hole pierced in ignorance,
(Hiding Heaven, as with a wall,)
Through which the eye sees nothing,
Till drawn close—and then sees all.

Were any truth made polestar,
We should then no longer steer
Unprofitable journeys,
Half by faith, and half by fear.
God soon shall be our Polestar,
And to Him shall we draw near.

THE END.

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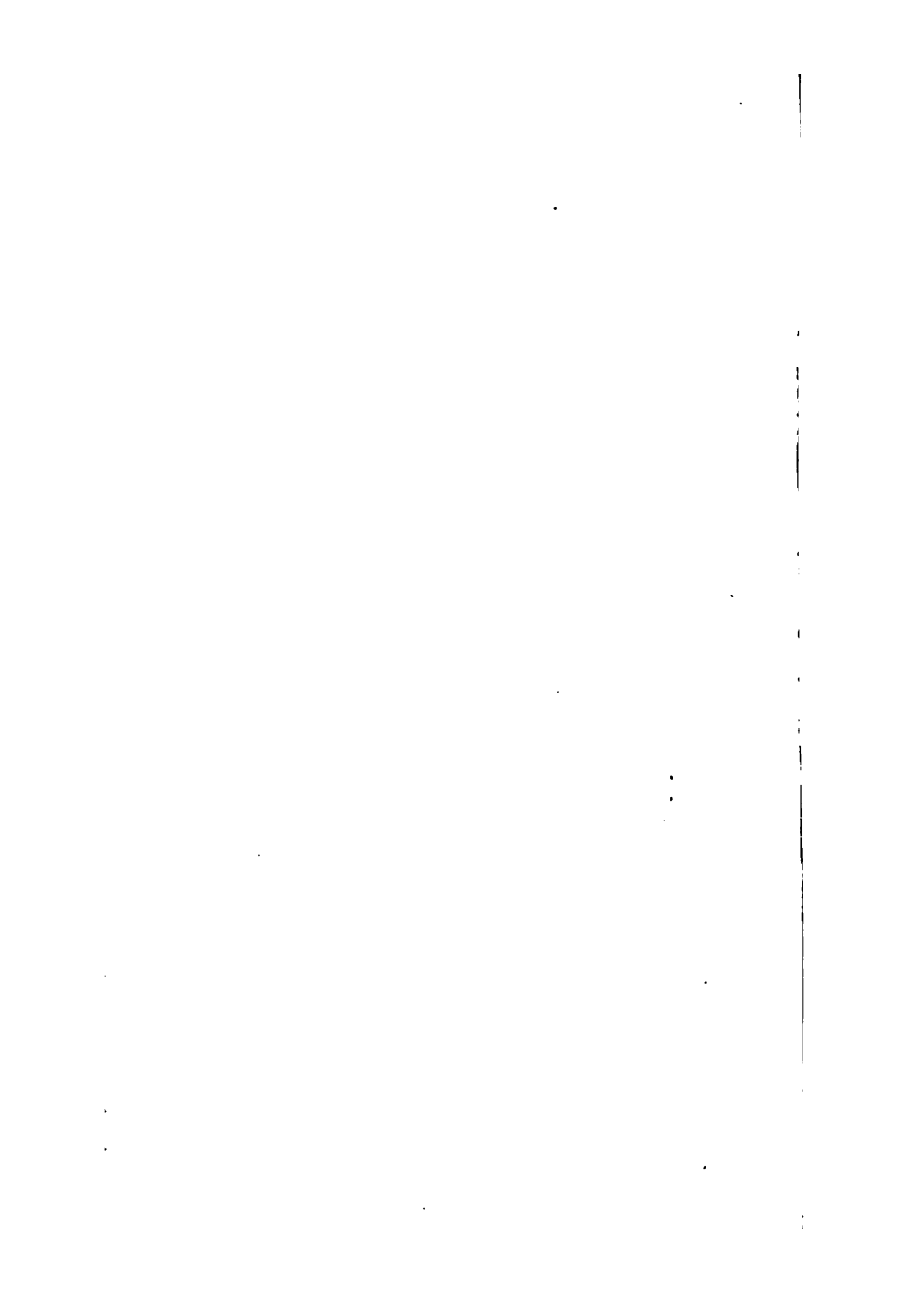
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